

IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES.

MARCH 30, 1860.—Ordered to be printed.

Mr. SIMMONS made the following

REPORT.

[To accompany Bill S. 341.]

The Committee on Claims, to whom was referred various memorials, asking payment for the recapture and destruction of the frigate Philadelphia, in the harbor of Tripoli, in the year 1804, submit the following report:

During our memorable contentions for the freedom of navigation of the Mediterranean, and after the war with Tripoli had commenced, a small squadron, under the command of Commodore Preble, (the United States frigate Constitution being the flag-ship,) was dispatched by our government, for the purpose of carrying on hostilities against that despotic power, and to bring it to terms.

The United States frigate Philadelphia, one of the squadron, commanded by Captain Bainbridge, when cruising off the harbor of Tripoli, struck upon the rocks lying in the immediate vicinity of the fortifications, and was stranded. Finding it impossible, after using every exertion, to get off his vessel, or to resist the overwhelming force of the enemy, Captain Bainbridge had to surrender; and his officers and men were made prisoners, and removed to the dungeons of the city fortifications. The frigate subsequently was got off the rocks by the Tripolitans, having sustained but little injury, and was removed by them within pistol shot of the Tripolitan navy, and made ready for sea. More than one hundred pieces of heavy cannon were mounted on board the different vessels of the Tripolitans, manned by upwards of one thousand seamen; and the whole lay within the immediate protection of formidable land batteries, consisting of one hundred and fifteen pieces of heavy artillery, and within sight of a force of twenty thousand troops, stationed in the city and its vicinity.

The loss of this fine frigate and her noble crew was seriously felt, and proved a great detriment to the American squadron, in carrying on efficient operations against an active enemy.

Under these circumstances, so annoying to our squadron, the then Lieutenant Decatur conceived the bold idea to recapture the frigate Philadelphia with his vessel, the United States schooner Enterprise, which he then commanded, and communicated his plan of operation to Commodore Preble. The commodore was fully impressed with the

importance of so daring an act, and approving of the plan, accepted the offer of Lieutenant Decatur's services. But sensible that success must depend on the secrecy, celerity, and gallantry of its execution, and that an attempt to bring out the frigate, if captured, would in all probability be attended with too great hazard and loss of life, gave peremptory orders to set fire, after capture, to every accessible part of the frigate, and after "blowing out her bottom," to abandon her.

In compliance with this permission, and his orders, Lieutenant Decatur manned a small ketch of about sixty tons, (which he had recently captured, and named by Commodore Preble, the "Intrepid,") with seventy officers and men, volunteers from his own vessel, and sailed from Syracuse, where the American squadron lay, on the 3d February, 1804.

He had an unusually stormy passage, and arrived on the 16th following off the coast. After perfecting all his arrangements, he ran after dark into the harbor of Tripoli, disguising his movements as much as possible to deceive the enemy, by whom he was observed and suspected, and at about 10, p. m., lay his vessel boldly alongside the Philadelphia, boarded and carried her sword in hand in the most gallant style, after a severe, though short conflict on the decks of the frigate, in which upwards of twenty of the enemy were slain, and the rest driven below or overboard.

The capture was made with such gallant daring, and with so many concurring favoring circumstances, that in the opinion of many, the frigate could easily have been carried out of the harbor, and again added to the American squadron. But the peremptory orders of Commodore Preble forbade such an attempt, and after deliberately setting the captured vessel on fire, as directed in his instructions, and remaining on board "until the fire had communicated to the rigging and tops," Decatur abandoned her to her fate, bringing off his whole crew, under a heavy fire from the batteries and shipping, without the loss of a man, (having but one slightly wounded,) and rejoined the American squadron.

The details of this heroic transaction are given at large in House Doc. No. 27, 22d Congress, 1st session, containing the memorials of Mrs. Susan Decatur and Mrs. Mary Preble, accompanied by communications and reports of Commodore E. Preble, the then lieutenants Stephen Decatur, Charles Stewart, and others.

Amongst the many precedents, which the legislation of Congress affords for this measure of justice, the committee will only refer to the act of March 3, 1813, (2 Statutes at Large, page 818,) which provides for the payment to Captain Hull, of the frigate Constitution, his officers and crew, the sum of fifty thousand dollars, for the capture and destruction of the British frigate *Guerriere*, and the like sum to Captain Bainbridge, his officers and crew, for the capture and destruction of the British frigate *Java*. To which may be added the British sloop-of-war *Hermes*, *destroyed* by the garrison of Fort Boyer, Mobile Point, in September, 1814, and paid for by act of Congress.

Congress also paid for the capture and destruction of the *Peacock*, the *Penguin*, the *Avon*, and *Reindeer*, and several other vessels.

The people have an abiding interest in the achievements won under

the flag of our common country; they give strength to the national institutions, and at this day, in considering the blessings which have descended to us from our ancestors, we may regard the renown which they acquired as among the chief, and this capture now provided for, as one of the most famous.

The value of the recaptured frigate Philadelphia, with her armament and stores, was estimated at between two and three hundred thousand dollars, but intrinsically of far greater value to the belligerents at the time of capture and recapture.

To do an act of justice to the families of those engaged in that achievement, so fruitful in subsequent glorious results, the committee report the accompanying bill.

the fact of our common history, that the strength of the national
institution, and at this day in reviewing the progress which have
been made in our country, we may regard the progress which
they have made in securing the chief, and the progress may be said to be
one of the great success.

The state of the country, which is the subject of this chapter, with its
state and power, was estimated at about two and three hundred
thousand dollars, but the majority of the people who are in the
state as the state of a poor and weak.

In the act of looking to the future of the country in that
respect, as it is in the present, the progress of the country
may be said to be one of the great success.